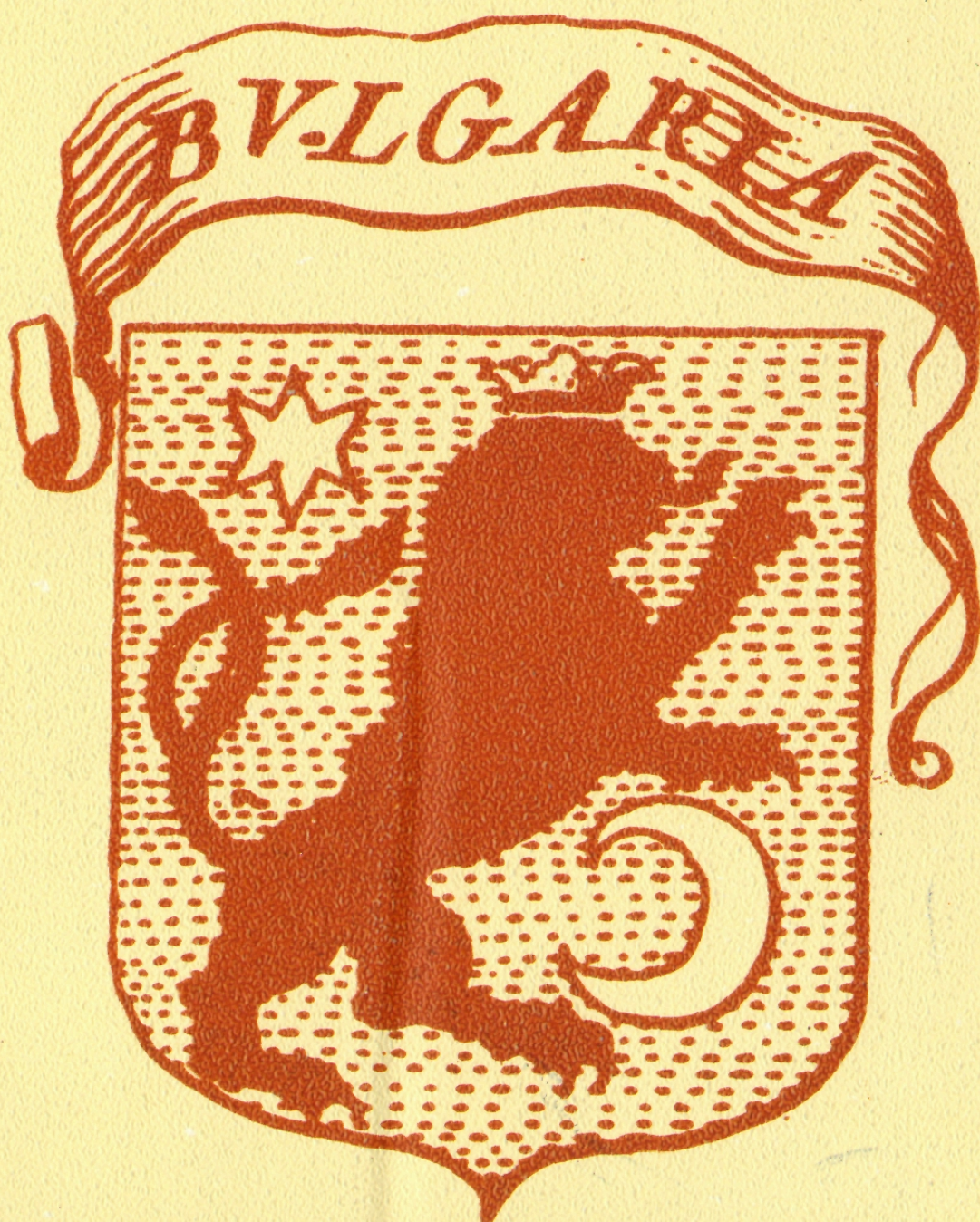

THE BULGARIANS IN 1688

THE CHIPROVTSI UPRISING
AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS
IN THE BALKANS AND IN EUROPE





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THE BULGARIANS IN 1688

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ANSWERS QUESTIONS OF
A SOFIA PRESS REPRESENTATIVE
ABOUT THE CHIPROVTSI UPRISING
AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS
IN THE BALKANS
AND IN EUROPE**

Introduction by Professor
STRASHIMIR DIMITROV

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INTRODUCTION

The Chiprovtsi Uprising marked a major stage in the Bulgarian people's struggles for overthrowing Ottoman political domination and for restoring the Bulgarian state. Its aims make it fully concordant with the bitter struggle of the European Christian states against the Ottoman invasion in Europe, a struggle which continued for several centuries in Central and South-eastern Europe.

Ottoman expansion intensified in the second half of the 17th century. The Ottoman ruling circles had already faced the first tangible signs of the internal crisis which was spreading throughout the empire. Disintegration of the outdated military-feudal system, unrest in the provinces and in the capital, janissary mutinies, a drop in the state revenues, disobedient provincial governors – these were the most striking symptoms of the forthcoming decay. The ruling circles of this feudal despotic system relied on endless wars which were to keep in proper trim the economic and military resources of the empire. Grand vizier Mehmed Koprulu recommended to Sultan Mehmed IV that he should not afford the troops and himself a minute's rest. Indeed, while the Sultan did not overwork himself, under his rule the troops had no peace. This meant continuous aggression against the empire's neighbours, and intermittent wars against Iran and the European neighbours.

In 1645 the Ottoman Empire began a lengthy war against Venice in order to drive out this state from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. The war continued 25 years

until in 1669 the Ottomans seized the last fortress on the Island of Crete. In 1666 they launched military actions against Poland. In 1672 the Sublime Porte seized the Podolia region and the Ukrainian lands along the right bank of the Dniepr and forced Poland to sign a treaty recognizing Ottoman domination over these lands. In 1676 the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia in order to seize Kiev and Left-bank Ukraine, but the 1681 peace treaty foiled these schemes although it recognized its reign over Right-bank Ukraine.

The intermittent wars with the European states, however, inevitably stimulated the liberation struggles of the Balkan Christian peoples. They regarded the European armies as their allies in the struggle for overthrowing Ottoman rule. Scores of thousands of Albanians and Greeks sided with Venice in the Venetian war of 1645–1669. After the unfavourable outcome of the war these people had to pay for their political misconduct. They either fled from their native places or declared themselves Moslems in order to avoid reprisals. Many of the crypto-Christian settlements and regions in Greece and Albania date back to this period.

As if following the old vizier's advice – not to give the army peace – in 1683 the Ottoman authorities declared war on Austria. A strong army led by Sultan Mehmed IV and Grand Vizier Mustafa Koprulu came to the walls surrounding Vienna. This cruel siege – the last one in the history of the Ottoman Empire – lasted three months and brought the garrison and the citizens of the Austrian capital to utmost exhaustion. The Polish army led by the talented commander John Sobieski came to Vienna's assistance on September 12. No sooner had the Polish troops arrived than they attacked the Ottoman camp and seized the grand vizier's tent and the state travelling office. The vizier managed to escape to Belgrade where he was caught and beheaded on the Sultan's orders. The fleeing Ottoman troops were overtaken in Hungary where they suffered another heavy blow.

These defeats failed to drain the material and human resources of the vast Ottoman state. However, the aggressive Ottoman policy did not affect Poland only and many other states were ready to join the anti-Ottoman coalition. Venice, Malta and in 1686 – Russia, joined the war. The Austrian troops operated in Hungary, Croatia and Serbia, the Polish troops – in Podolia and Ukraine, and the Venetian ones – in Dalmatia and Peloponnesos. The old Hungarian capital Buda was liberated in September 1686. In 1687 the Ottoman troops were defeated at Mohacs where in 1526 Suleiman I put an end to the united and sovereign Hungarian state. The Venetian troops captured a number of fortresses in Peloponnesos. The Russian troops had varying successes in the Crimea and the Northern Black Sea coast. Belgrade was liberated in 1688.

The successes of the European allies inspired the Balkan peoples subject to the Porte for new liberation struggles. There was a sufficient number of people well versed in politics who realized that only in alliance with some European power could they drive the Ottoman invaders out of their countries. Thousands of volunteers from Banat, Srem, Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia joined the Austrian-Polish troops. Numerous detachments carried out independent actions against the Ottoman troops. The liberation of Belgrade gave a fresh impetus to the struggles of the Serbian people. Serbian detachments liberated a number of towns prior to the arrival of the Austrian troops. The appearance of Venetian troops in Peloponnesos triggered off a hostile reaction among the Greek population. Although the Catholic Venetian troops treated the Orthodox Greeks with disrespect, the latter fought hard and managed to clear the Peloponnesos from Ottoman forces.

The allies had a stake at promoting a mass liberation movement among the subjugated people since it distracted the attention of the Ottoman forces and facilitated the actions

of the European armies. The Habsburg dynasty established close ties with some Serbian notables and used their influence for fanning up the anti-Ottoman struggle. Austrian emissaries promised full support to Serbians, Bulgarians, Albanians, Wallachians and Moldovans if they took part in the war. However, the Balkan Christians' aspirations to acquire political independence and establish states of their own ran counter to the political aims of the European allies. The fate of Serbian leader Georgi Brankovich who passed himself off as a descendant of a mediaeval Serbian ruling dynasty provides a telling example. Austria supported him until a mass Serbian movement took shape. When he claimed independence he fell into disgrace and was imprisoned. The territories liberated from Ottoman domination had to be placed under Austrian or Venetian rule rather than help restore the former Balkan states.

Such was the background of the Chiprovtsi Uprising and of the 1688 insurgent's movement in Bulgaria in general. The answers of Senior Research Associate Bozhidar Dimitrov deal with its causes and the major events in it. These events were an expression of the Bulgarian people's natural striving for political liberation and were much favoured by the military-political situation and the advancement of the Austrian and Polish troops in the Balkans. The strong Austrian influence over Bulgarian Catholics was easy to explain. Common political interest was complemented by religious closeness. It was the common political interest in driving away the Ottomans that won so many Orthodox Bulgarians too for the armed struggle against the enslaver.

No doubt, clerics played a dominant role in the religious and political leadership of the masses at that time, as is evidenced by the answers. However, the insurgent struggle was led by secular functionaries, mainly men from the tradesmen's class. The latter was no longer just an economic factor, but had also become a politically-minded group. Be-

sides the Chiprovtsi and Karposh uprisings, discussed in detail in this book, tradesmen's settlements near Turnovo, Provadiya, the old bishop's centre of Cherven and others were likewise involved in the preparations for the riot. When in May 1686 the Ottoman authorities subjected Arbanassi (Turnovo region) to a blockade and repressions, it became clear that 52 of its inhabitants were "in Hungary and Poland", i.e. in the camp of the forces fighting against the Porte. The inhabitants of Arbanassi maintained that these people had gone there "on business". The business circles which consolidated their economic positions in the 16th and 17th centuries maintained close ties with the European markets and countries. They were best acquainted with the political situation in Europe and could use it to their advantage.

In this sense, the liberation struggles in the last quarter of the 17th century marked the beginning of a political upsurge and of the formation of these new social forces in the Bulgarian society.

Professor STRASHIMIR DIMITROV

At the time of Ottoman invasion in the West, the liberation movements were a reserve force of the all-European resistance against it. What is the historical interpretation of the Bulgarians' armed actions during the 15th–17th centuries?

I completely agree with you that the five Bulgarian liberation uprisings during the 15th through the 17th century (the uprising of Konstantin and Frouzhin in 1408–1412, the First and the Second Turnovo Uprisings in 1598 and 1686, the Chiprovtsi Uprising in 1688 and the Karposh Uprising in 1689) assisted the European political formations directly threatened by the Ottoman aggression. They are an impressive manifestation of the permanent anti-Ottoman resistance of the Bulgarians: incessant actions of hundreds of haidouts (rebels) and haidout detachments, mass refusal to fulfil feudal duties, leakage of reconnaissance information which Bulgarians transmitted to forces, hostile to the Ottoman Empire: All this actually eroded the military and state apparatus of the Ottomans and helped the resistance and counter-offensives of Christian Europe to the barbaric Asian conqueror.

In this sense, both Bulgarian and foreign historiography give a high appraisal of the resistance of the Bulgarians (and of the remaining Balkan peoples) to the Ottomans. This appraisal is marked by an unanimity rare for international historiography. It is a different matter that the possibilities for a more detailed study of this resistance have not been tapped to the full. The available sources are scarce

and what is more, all extant documents are kept in archives outside Bulgaria which hampers Bulgarian scholars in their research. Suffice it to mention that the Second Turnovo Uprising is known by a single document, the Karposh Uprising by 3 or 4, the date of the suppression of the Chiprovtsi Uprising was established only recently, while the exact date of its outbreak is still unknown.

The good relations and cooperation established in the last 20 years between Bulgarian scientific institutions and state, cultural and scientific institutions in the Vatican, Italy, Austria, France, Spain, Yugoslavia and other European countries have thrown light on some unknown aspects of the Bulgarian liberation struggles between the 15th and 18th centuries. This propitious scientific climate will probably help the Bulgarian and foreign scholars to reveal the true dimensions of the Bulgarian anti-Ottoman struggle as part of the resistance of the European civilisation against the barbarity of the Ottoman invasion.

What, according to historians, was in most general terms the situation of the Bulgarians in the second half of the 17th century?

It would be most easy to use the cliché always handy in all studies of the Chiprovtsi Uprising: that the Bulgarian people's situation "sharply deteriorated". It was so indeed – from 1645 till the end of the century the Ottoman state waged intermittent wars against some or all of its enemies in Europe. And it is a well-known fact that during a war taxes and task work increased, the output of Bulgarian peasants and craftsmen was bought for a song or was simply expropriated, violence and malpractices were rife. The Sofia Catholic archbishop Peter Bogdan wrote in one of his messages: "Never before in my life have I seen or heard of such hard times". Another Catholic priest wrote: "Such

things have never happened since the Turks conquered these countries". Even Turkish authors who lived at that period acknowledge that the living conditions of the Christian Balkan peoples were horrible. One of them, Kucibei, exclaims: "How can the rayah put up with such oppression, how can the people tolerate such injustice?"

I have the feeling that by asking this question you expect me to say that the worsened situation of the Bulgarian people in the second half of the 17th century was the main cause of the Bulgarian uprisings. But this was not the case. The situation of the Bulgarian people had been hard enough even before this deterioration. When the independent Bulgarian state stopped to exist in the late 14th century this was for the Bulgarian people not merely a replacement of one political power with another. At that time or somewhat later many peoples in Europe also lost their political independence and some of them (Czechs and Poles) regained it as late as 1918. Yet none of these peoples lost all their political, cultural and religious structures – the bulwarks of every nationality. In Bulgaria the conqueror destroyed not only the royal institution, but also the aristocracy and the higher clergy which were the natural political leaders of the people in this epoch. The Bulgarian church was also deprived of its independence.

The status of the Bulgarian population (predominantly Christian) within the Ottoman feudal system has no precedent in world history. For centuries on end the Ottoman authorities did not recognise even the most fundamental human rights of the Bulgarian Christians. Numerous taxes whose official size (unbearable as it was) swelled due to corruption, plunder, misappropriation and violence of the state apparatus, stifled any economic initiative and prospect for development. Juridically, the Bulgarians did not exist – they were *rum millet*, i.e. a "Roman people" as the Ottoman authorities called the peoples on the Balkan

Peninsula who fell under their domination. In Ottoman legal proceedings, the testimony of a single Moslem was sufficient to have the unanimous testimonies of a thousand Bulgarians refuted.

The Bulgarians were deprived of any guarantees to their life and property. Any Ottoman could take away the wife or children of a Bulgarian, subject him to physical violence or plunder whatever he wished from his property without being punished by the state. Biological violence was even institutionalised: between the 15th and 17th century one of the taxes (*devsirme*) envisaged that the healthiest and fairest Bulgarian boys were taken away to Asia Minor where they were brought up in a fanatic devotion to Islam and formed units of elite Ottoman troops. Beautiful Bulgarian women and girls were taken to Ottoman harems.

It is difficult to list all forms of national, cultural and intellectual discrimination to which the Bulgarian people were subjected. Under the Ottoman state system, the Bulgarian people was deprived of elementary living conditions and of future for that matter. The values of European civilisation in which they were reared and which they had cherished and developed in the course of many centuries of existence in this part of Europe, were fundamentally alien to the system they were forced to put up with. All this determines their hostility to the Asiatic empire which had spread out in Europe, and the continuous anti-Ottoman resistance. And if this resistance had not led to more frequent uprisings, the reasons were rooted in the lack of social strata and groups which could have been natural political and intellectual leaders, of the limited human potential in the initial centuries of foreign domination, of armament and of people well-versed in the art of warfare, of reliable political and military allies.

What were the characteristic features of the situation in the Balkans and in Europe during the Chiprovtsi Uprising?

In 1683, a 200,000-strong Turkish army crossed the Balkan Peninsula and concentrated at Vienna's walls. This was the Ottoman Empire's successive and last attempt, undertaken at the cost of total mobilisation of all available resources, to break Europe's defence and subjugate the Old Continent. However, the correlation of forces had essentially changed. The 17th-century Europe was far ahead of the Ottomans technically and technologically. Its troops were armed with much more sophisticated weapons. The new crops imported from America and widely grown already in the 16th century, had helped overcome the chronic food shortage in Europe; there was a genuine demographic boom thanks to the higher living standards and termination of religious struggles. The European armies were numerically superior to the Ottoman hordes. But the most important of all was the European political platform. For centuries on end thousands of European public figures had worked for the establishment of an alliance (called "The Sacred League") of all anti-Ottoman state formations. In the early 1680s this alliance included Austria, Venice, the Papal state, Poland, Russia, the Don and Zaporozhye Cossacks, Wallachia and Moldova; representatives of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Albania promised to contribute.

The total defeat of the Ottoman army which sieged Vienna in 1683 was followed by destructive blows which the Venetians inflicted on the Turks in Peloponnesos, Attica and on sea. Russians, Poles and Cossacks dealt heavy blows to the Turks and their allies in the coastal steppes of Ukraine. The discord among the highest echelon of power in the Ottoman Empire provoked by the continuous failures, and the poor organisation of the Ottoman military apparatus created prerequisites for driving the Turks out

of Europe. In 1688 this possibility became quite feasible. On September 6, 1688 the Ottomans suffered another fatal defeat at Belgrade and the Ottoman army ceased to exist as an organised military power. Discord and strife among Ottoman rulers and commanders were rife. Without any delay, the Austrian army launched a large-scale offensive and reached the western Bulgarian territories. Individual columns reached as far as Skopje, Nis and Vidin.

What were the immediate prerequisites for the Chiprovtsi Uprising? Why did the liberation struggle in Bulgaria intensify in the second half of the 17th century?

To begin with, all this was the clear awareness of the different social strata in Bulgaria about the military-political situation of the Ottoman Empire between 1683 and 1688. In 1688 the probability of forcing the Ottomans even beyond the Straits seemed a hundred per cent one. Moreover, the Bulgarians were also aware of other things aggravating the situation of the Ottoman state which were not so obvious to Europe. A number of messages by Bulgarians employed by the intelligence services of many European states, in addition to a series of accounts by Bulgarian Catholic clergymen testify that in the second half of the 17th century the Turkish and Moslem population in Bulgaria and in the Balkans sharply diminished and in some regions even disappeared. The major demographic changes were also due to the loss of manpower in the heavy wars at the end of the 16th and throughout the 17th century against Austrians, Venetians, Spaniards, Russians and Poles. The victory of the Christian squadrons at Lepanto in 1671 meant that the Ottomans' easy and almost bloodless triumphs in their wars around Europe had been relegated to the past. From then on, even when victorious, the Ottomans lost scores of thousands of young men. A case

in point is the capture of the Candia fortress at the island of Crete where 100,000 Ottoman soldiers died. The demographic potential of the Moslem population was also sizeably drained by the epidemics against which they, unlike Christians, took no measures complying with the Koran prescriptions.

Over that period, the Bulgarian people who had no right to participate in the army according to the laws of the Ottoman Empire, restored its demographic potential which quickly outstripped the conqueror's demographic resources. The Bulgarians took control of the economy of the Bulgarian lands, which were the prevailing part of the Empire's European possessions: e.g. farming, crafts and trade. Bulgarians settled even in regions which had not been permanently included in the mediaeval Bulgarian state – Eastern Thrace, the northern coast of the Aegean Sea. All this boosted the self-confidence of the Bulgarians inspiring them with hopes for a successful outcome of the liberation struggle to be waged between 1686 and 1689. If we are to assess the prerequisites for this successful outcome from a modern viewpoint, we should admit that they had never been more favourable. Even later, during the political crisis between 1875 and 1878 which brought the five centuries of Ottoman domination to an end and Bulgaria gained its liberty, the situation and dislocation of forces were much less favourable for restoring the Bulgarian state independence. In the late 17th century free Europe and the oppressed Balkan peoples were united against the Asian conquerors while in 1875–1878 the Balkan people which were fighting for their independence and Russia which was supporting them were facing not only the Ottoman Empire with the million-strong, modernly equipped and well organized army but also against the bloc of the strongest West European countries.

Among the Bulgarian Franciscans most prominent were Peter Parchevich (1612–1674) – a champion of the Bulgaria's liberation cause during the 17th century and Peter Bogdan Bakshev (1601–1674) – an outstanding man of letters, stood out in bold relief. What role did they play in stimulating the Bulgarian enlightenment and liberation during that epoch?

I would not differentiate between the two outstanding figures in the Bulgarian political and cultural life during the 17th century – the one was an eminent man of letters and the other a champion of the liberating cause. Both of them were also politicians and cultural figures. Analyzing the documents which have been found during the last decade and comparing the information to the facts known earlier it becomes clear that Peter Bogdan Bakshev was in fact organizer, leader and, what is most important, theoretician of the strategy and tactics of the liberation cause. Peter Parchevich proved to be an energetic diplomat, visiting the capitals of many countries pleading Bulgaria's liberation. During his visits he presented himself as the envoy of a conspiratorial organisation headed by the archbishop of Sofia, i.e. Peter Bogdan. The messages which he sent out state bodies of the European anti-Ottoman powers were in most cases written by himself. This fact did not in the least diminish the role of Peter Parchevich – the flying diplomat of the Bulgarian liberating revolution, who sacrificed his personal life and brilliant career, and suffered morally and physically in the name of the Bulgarian freedom.

Peter Bogdan and Peter Parchevich belong to the high Catholic Church hierarchy which was formed in the Bulgarian territories in the period between 1601–1656. The former was the archbishop of the Sofia and the latter – of the Marcianopolis (Preslav) dioceses. The Catholic propaganda in Bulgaria did not expand its basis in our lands as

a result of the decisions of the Tridentum Council in the 16th century. The Bulgarian catholics numbered between 8,000 and 10 000 in the 17th century – a modest figure in comparison with the several million Christian Bulgarian population. The activities of the Catholic Church structure were of importance by far greater in proportion to the number of its followers in Bulgaria.

In the first place the boundaries of the Sofia, Mar-cianopolis, Nikopol, Ohrid and Skopje dioceses, defined as Bulgarian by such a prestigious international institution as the Roman Curia, provided the legitimate foundations for the formation of the Bulgarian ethnic boundaries. A Bulgarian intelligentsia was formed within a short period of time – only four decades due to the network of schools and the opportunities for studying in colleges and universities in Europe. It was a highly educated intelligentsia for those days in Europe, an intelligentsia which shared one of the most important achievements of the European Renaissance – the idea of freedom as the supreme goal of human existence, enterprising in spirit, with broad international bonds and eager to achieve its aspirations.

It is only natural that this intelligentsia should head and, what is most important, chart the trends of the struggle for the overthrow of Ottoman rule which epitomized everything backward and barbarian.

We should assess also the role of the two archbishops Peter Bogdan and Peter Parchevich between 1630 and 1674. They launched initiatives and dedicatedly worked for the liberation cause of their people. The official posts they held and their intellect and sense of responsibility made them the personalities who created the network of dioceses and schools, who published and wrote books and studies, formed secret organisations and master-minded anti-Ottoman coalitions.

It would be no exaggeration to say that those two great Bulgarians and two others of their stature, Filip Stanislavov and Francesco Soimirovich, were the pioneers of the formation of Bulgarian educational and cultural institutions, independent church and last but not least, the national-liberation revolutionary organisations, which would be further developed on a larger scale by the activists of the National Revival later on. Naturally, for a number of historical reasons that phenomenon had a limited scope in the 17th century.

Bulgarian and foreign scholars alike recognize the enormous value of the versatile activities of Peter Bogdan and Peter Parchevich.

There have been certain disputes in the past concerning the activities of the two archbishops; some scholars saw them as a natural manifestation of catholicism as a system of ideas; others, having in mind the ban issued by the Roman Curia on their political activities and the punishments imposed on Peter Parchevich and Filip Stanislavov, maintain that the Bulgarian archiereys acted as Bulgarians rather than as church officials. I think that both opinions are pretentious and most probably a little influenced by ad hoc considerations and social tendencies. The Vatican did not want the Bulgarian Catholic intellectuals to deal with revolutionary political activity and forbid them such activities. Naturally it was not motivated by pro-Ottoman sentiments – the Vatican was one of the die-hard enemies of the Ottoman Empire taking direct and indirect part in all anti-Ottoman campaigns. Rome's attitude was understandable – the Vatican was afraid lest a failure of such an action should destroy the fragile catholic presence in Bulgaria. Peter Bogdan and Peter Parchevich, in my opinion, did not comply with the bans not because they were bad catholics and good Bulgarians, but because they had a much broader concept about their duties of spiritual leaders of their compatriots.

Elucidating his motives for writing in 1667 *History of Bulgaria* (the first book about Bulgarian history written by a Bulgarian) Peter Bogdan declared: ...“I wrote that history ... mainly with the conviction that it would be a pity to leave this world without fulfilling a duty which my homeland is justifiably expecting me to fulfil”. The great Bulgarians, archbishops Peter Bogdan and Peter Parchevich, died in one and the same year by the will of fate. They fulfilled their duty to Bulgaria – the Chiprovtsi Uprising which their disciples staged, though defeated, extolled their ideas and cause.

What would you say about the organisation and the progress of the Chiprovtsi Uprising? Please tell us also about the importance of the other armed actions of the Bulgarians at that time.

I have already mentioned that we do not have complete information about the organisation and progress of the uprising. There are also some disputable issues. In the light of the sources which we know of it is certain that in early 1688 a group of people from Chiprovtsi and other Bulgarians from North-Western Bulgaria formed a detachment of several hundred who joined the Austrian army in the region of Belgrade. The detachment which was headed by Georgi Peyachevich from Chiprovtsi, took part in a number of battles and excelled in capturing the Danubian fortress of Orsova.

After the seizure of Belgrade by the Austrian army (September 6, 1688) the able-bodied men from Chiprovtsi, Zhelezna, Kopilovets and Klissoura formed another eight bands. In view of the fact that the population of the four villages was not more than 5 000 we can surmise that they were several hundred, i.e. detachments of one hundred fighters each, which snow-balled as many Bulgarians

from the villages of North–Western Bulgaria joined them.

Those detachments under the command of Bogdan Marinov, Ivan and Mihail Stanislavov, Louka Andreichin, attacked the big Turkish garrison in Koutlovitsa (present-day Mihailovgrad) and defeated it. After that the detachments split up and part of them continued to be active in the region overrunning the bashibazouk hordes while the others set out for Vidin to establish contact with the Austrian troops advancing towards the important Danubian fortress.

The first insurgent unit which persecuted individual Ottoman formations, neglected the defence of Chiprovtsi and the town was unexpectedly attacked by an Ottoman army unit which had been probably sent by the Sofia chief bey. He had issued an order for the town and the nearby settlements to be destroyed and the population massacred with the exception of young women and the male children under six who were to be converted to Mohammedanism. The sinister order of the chief bey was not put to effect due to the small number of the attackers – only 1 000 people of Chiprovtsi were killed, 800 were enslaved, and about 3 000 succeeded to escape along the ridges of the Stara Planina mountains. Chiprovtsi, Zhelezna, Kopilovets and Klissoura were plundered and razed to the ground between October 10 and 17, 1688.

Given this situation the two insurgent units stopped the military operations against the Turkish armies which had returned to the region of Chiprovtsi, guaranteed the security of the population that had survived and they fought their way to the Danube, and crossed it in complete order and without sustaining any losses. A considerable part of the insurgents joined the existing or the newly formed Bulgarian detachments in the Austrian army, fighting the Turks until the end of the war (1699).

In 1689, only a year after the defeat of the uprising, a

detachment under the command of Captain Horvat, succeeded in reaching as far as Chiprovtsi to find a heap of ashes where the town – known as “the flower of Bulgaria”, had stood until recently. That same year the South-western regions of the Bulgarian lands became the centre of the Bulgarian liberation movement. Scores of armed Bulgarian detachments were organized by the Rhodope outlaw Karposh (who at that time fought in the region of Dospat) in a strong insurgent army. Karposh even declared the restoration of the Bulgarian state independence and crowned an unknown priest of Bitola a Bulgarian king in his headquarters in Koumanovo (according to other sources he proclaimed himself a king of Bulgaria). The outlaw Strahil organized a strong insurgent detachment which fought its way to Pirot in the region of Pazardjik where he had been active earlier. The insurgent armies captured Kyustendil and headed for Sofia.

Unfortunately precisely at that time Austria was attacked in the rear by France. The Austrians were forced to withdraw part of their troops from the Balkans and deployed them in the west. The destroyed Turkish army was reinforced by another 30 000 Crimean Tartars who arrived on the Balkan front. The Bulgarian insurgents and the few Austrian units were driven out of the Bulgarian territories. Although the Turks suffered defeats in the region of the middle reaches of the Danube late in the 17th century, the peace treaty of 1699 left Bulgaria under the rule of the Ottoman Empire; Central Europe was drained of its fighting capacities and could not launch another offensive.

The events in the Bulgarian lands in that period had some repercussions in the Balkans and in the world. Would you tell us where and why?

The Chiprovtsi uprising was one of a series mass uprisings of the Bulgarians, Serbians and Greeks in the Balkan

Peninsula in the period of the war of the "Sacred League". The dream of Peter Bogdan and Peter Parchevich came true. In 1656 they had organized a secret organisation of representatives of all enslaved Balkan peoples in the Wallachian capital Targovishte with the aim of organizing a Balkan uprising against the Turks. It was an attempt which at that time did not succeed due to unfavourable circumstances.

The defeat of the Chiprovtsi uprising was followed a year later by the defeat of all insurgent movements. Albeit their failure they indicated the correct road to be followed by the Balkan peoples for overthrowing the yoke of the common enemy – joint coordinated action and not internecine struggles. The Balkan War of 1912–1913 which drove the Turks out of Europe was a brilliant proof of the viability of that road. The disunity that followed and the new contradictions between the Balkan states brought only suffering to their peoples.

If we trace the data in the rich European sources about the Bulgarian uprisings of 1686–1689 and also about the armed actions of the Bulgarians that followed two aspects draw the attention. The first one – admiration at the Bulgarians' resolve to fight for their freedom. The second one, which is more important – the Bulgarians having become a factor in European policy, at least a factor in the policy of states in Central and South Europe, which were directly concerned about the future of the south-eastern territories of the Old Continent.

It is known that most of the insurgents who survived in the north-western Bulgarian territories left their native lands and settled in foreign countries. What was their fate?

According to historical sources three thousand Bulgarian catholics from the area of Chiprovtsi crossed the

Danube and settled in Wallachia. The Wallachian voevode Konstantin Brankoviyanu sympathized with them and did his best to make their life easier. About one thousand residents of the Chiprovtsi area, mainly young women and children, were taken slaves by the Turks. First I would like to dwell on their fate about which until recently very little was known. There are documents which testify that the majority of them were ransomed in various ways: some of them were ransomed by Dubrovnik tradesmen who had colonies in the big cities in the Bulgarian lands; others – by rich Orthodox Bulgarians; yet others were freed for sums transferred to their relatives by the Congregation for the propaganda of the Christian faith in Rome.

The true historian is believed to be as composed as a surgeon – not to succumb to any emotions yet I shall admit that I was shocked when I read a letter dating from 1689 which was found by senior research associate Y.Spisarevska in the archives of the Congregation in Rome. In it one of the insurgents Georgi Lukerich asks for a sum of money which he needed to redeem his young wife and his three children, the biggest of whom was six years-old. The sum of money was granted to him but it is not known whether he succeeded to buy off his family.

Some of those who were freed managed to re-unite with their relatives in Wallachia, others enrolled schools in Rome while little children and young women who had remained without close friends and relatives were offered hospitality by the Bulgarian catholic families in the villages of Kaluchli and Baltadji (today residential districts of the town of Rakovski, Plovdiv region).

Those who crossed the Danube were joined at about that time or later (in the war year 1699 and after that) by thousands of Bulgarians – Orthodox and catholics from North-western and also from South-western Bulgaria and

settled in Wallachia or on the territories of the Habsburg dynasty. Those Bulgarians numbered between 30 000 and 50 000.

Their fate was dramatic: I think that no other Bulgarian emigrants (unfortunately there were a lot of emigrants during the five centuries of Ottoman domination) suffered so many hardships and misfortunes. In spite of this they and their descendants manifested creative daring and high political consciousness.

The leaders of the Chiprovtsi Uprising Peyachevich, Parchevich, Peikich, Markovich, Bogdanov and Knyazhev and their families settled in the Habsburg monarchy (in Croatia, Hungary, Austria, Transylvania). Having held high officers' ranks as early as the years of the war against Turkey, after it they obtained estates, nobleman's titles and high posts in the administration. The Peyachevich-Parchevich family enjoyed special privileges: late in the 18th century Marko Peyachevich was made peer. Representatives of the family were important factors in the centuries to come on the political scene of Croatia.

The large number of refugees to Wallachia settled in the towns of Craiova, Rimnick, Bradicheni, Kumpolung, Targovishte and scores of villages. The Bulgarians began to migrate to Sedmigrad as a result of the invasions of the Crimean Tartars.

In 1700 the Bulgarian community in the town of Alvits was granted a lot of privileges, other large Bulgarian groups settled in the towns of Deva and Sibin. The wars and the unrest in the territories where the Bulgarians settled in the first decades of the 18th century, made them move from place to place. Then in early 1738 Bulgarians from North-western Bulgaria who were persecuted by the Ottoman troops advancing to Wallachia settled in Banat and formed big Bulgarian colonies in Besenov (mainly Bulgarians from the Nikopol villages) and in Vinga (Bulgarians from the Chiprovtsi region).

Basing themselves on their merits in the war against Turks, the Bulgarians asked the Austrian authorities for some privileges and sent for that purpose a delegation to Vienna. We should do Austria justice because it gave its Bulgarian allies their due in the struggle against their common enemy. By a decree of Empress Maria Theresa of August 1, 1744 the Bulgarians of Vinga were granted complete economic, juridical and religious autonomy. The Chiprovtsi Bulgarians received 20 000 ha of land.

One of the delegates Nikola Kachamagov, a brave Bulgarian, became the favourite of the empress and was awarded the title of baron and the right to hunting in the entire Banat. Beshenov was also granted a lot of privileges and tax alleviations, yet part of its population migrated to Vinga. The news of the Austrian hospitality made a lot of Bulgarians settle in the villages of Bresta, Telepa, Deta, Timisoara, Arad, Sun Nikolae mare (today in Romania), in the villages of Modos, Kanak, Ivanovo, Giurgiu, Macedonia, Stari Lets etc. (today in Yugoslavia). Orthodox Bulgarians from Chiprovtsi settled in 1690 in Hungary (in the village of Sentendre, which once was called Bulgarevo).

The favourable conditions guaranteed by the Austrian authorities (not a single group of the population within the boundaries of the empire enjoyed such privileges) provided opportunities for achieving great successes in the economy and the cultural life of the settlements. The Bulgarians organized big farms, became good tradesmen and skilled craftsmen. The outstanding Bulgarian scholar L. Miletic who visited the Bulgarian communities in the late 19th century was amazed at the asphalted streets in Vinga, a clean modern town, at a time when even the capital of the newly liberated Bulgaria was steeped in mud.

Schools were opened in 1739 in Besenov and in 1741 in Vinga. The aspiration of the Bulgarians to preserve their

national identity was obvious during the three centuries after their settlement in Banat. The processes of national revival in the second half of the 19th century reached Banat. The Bulgarian language was taught in the schools – the teachers Leopold Kosilkov and Yozo Ril published Bulgarian textbooks. The Bulgarians in Banat boasted outstanding scholars, public figures, military men – Eusebius Fermendjin, professor in the University of Zagreb, author of valuable works on Bulgarian history, Franz Peyachevich, author of History of Bulgaria, jurists Karol Telbizov and Anton Lebanov, Ferdinand Dechev – interpreter of General Dragomirov in the 1877–1878 War of Liberation (his son was Academician Dimiter Dechev), colonel Stefan Dounyov who took part in the Hungarian uprising in 1848 and was commander of the artillery of Garibaldi in his liberation march in Italy.

In spite of their material prosperity the descendants of the Bulgarian insurgents of 1688 constantly lived with the idea of going back to their native lands. The liberation of Bulgaria in 1878 gave fresh impetus to their century-old dream. Great migration started stimulated also by the laws and decrees of the Bulgarian government for populating deserted lands in Bulgaria. The first 60 families came back in 1881 and settled in what is today the village of Dragomirovo, Svishtov region. Then followed another group of 250 families although they were not allowed to leave by the Austrian authorities who did not want to deprive the Empire of an industrious population. Yet a lot of families at the cost of many hardships managed to reach Bulgaria at different periods. The Banat Bulgarians founded the village of Burdarski geran, Byala Slatina region, in 1887, the villages of Assenovo, Gostilya and Bre-gare – in Pleven region in 1892 and also the villages of Djourilovo and Mahmoudia in the region of Oryahovo whose population migrated later to the neighbouring vil-

lages. The Banat Bulgarians were very good farmers and had a high standard of life and after coming back to Bulgaria they served as an example to their compatriots. There were families who continued to migrate from Banat to Bulgaria until the end of the Second World War.

The majority of the descendants of the insurgents of 1688 remained in Banat, a historical place in South-eastern Europe (between the Transylvanian Alpes, the rivers Mures and Danube).

In conclusion what is the general assessment of the revolutionary struggles of the Bulgarians during the late 17th century from the point of view of continuity in the process of the formation and establishment of the Bulgarian nation?

It would not be fair to give a one-sided answer to the question – in the circles of professional historians we often argue about the role of the Chiprovtsi Uprising, and also of all Bulgarian uprisings against the Ottoman rulers in the historical destinies of Bulgaria. They are doubtlessly a great feat in the continuous aspiration of the Bulgarians towards freedom – this is a formulation which we all agree with. Yet we cannot but take into account that each uprising took a heavy toll of thousands of Bulgarian lives, others emigrated to foreign countries where they usually were assimilated – the Banat Bulgarians were a felicitious exception in the period between the 15th and the 19th century when enormous groups of people emigrated abroad and were assimilated. Economic and cultural structures created at the cost of great labour and suffering were mercilessly destroyed. I for one think that the atrocities perpetrated by the oppressors during the uprisings of 1686–1689 was another heavy trial for the Bulgarian people, which can be compared to the catastrophe during the last decades of the 14th century – the years of the Ottoman invasion in the Bulgarian lands.

In spite of all this I am inclined to think that the maxim “better on one’s knees than dead” is an unworthy one for an ancient and proud people like the Bulgarian. This concerns every nation. Albeit the shocking figures of the losses which each recorder of the events has calculated – I feel proud that my people did not succumb to “kneel down” and that it has taken every opportunity to fight for its freedom arms in hand.

It should be borne in mind that the culmination of the Bulgarian national liberation revolution – the April 1876 Uprising was involved to a lot of victims and suffering, but it was followed by the Russo-Turkish War of Liberation of 1877–1878 which brought the liberation of Bulgaria from the five centuries of Ottoman domination.

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